EDUCATION COMMITTEE

I wish to make a statement to the House concerning the decision of the Education Committee not to confirm the recommendation of the Children's Sub-Committee to appoint an unmarried mother to the post of Housemother at the Children's Home at Haut de la Garenne.

The Members of the Education Committee wish it to be abundantly clear that at all times in the whole wide field of Education and Child Welfare, often involving the deepest human relationships, their first responsibility is the children in their care.

In giving the most careful thought and consideration to this problem the Committee came unanimously to the opinion, including its two members who sit on the Children's Sub-Committee, that having regard to the particular circumstances at Haut de la Garenne it would not be, in the long term, in the interests of the children in their care and protection to appoint an unmarried mother to the post of Housemother.

It will, I am sure, be recognised by everyone, even those people who do not come into contact with this vital social work in our Island, that the post of Housemother or Housefather calls for the highest vocational standards and example. The ideal at Haut de la Garenne is to provide the closest possible equivalent conditions to those of parents and children in normal homes.

That is the perpetual aim and expressed ideal of all those directly involved in this work with deprived and often emotionally disturbed children. That is why the greatest care is taken in the selection of Houseparents for Haut de la Garenne.

At Haut de la Garenne where we have children varying in age from young babies of a few months to adolescents of eighteen of both sexes, generally grouped in numbers of ten to twelve children and cared for whenever possible by married couples with children of their own, there have developed families within families.

The work of the Houseparents calls for the highest possible standards and people who undertake this work should, as far as possible, be themselves devoid of personal stress, strains and tensions in order to do justice to this demanding work amongst emotionally disturbed children deprived of their normal home environment, parental affection and security.

To ask an unmarried mother to tackle the onerous task of Housemother would be as unfair to the children placed in her care by the Education Committee, as it would be to the unmarried mother herself. She would, in the Committee's view, be exposed to the cruellest gibes from adolescents for whose moral behaviour she would be responsible. Wittingly to expose her now and in the future to stresses of this nature would make her task impossible and her work intolerable. It would be wrong to add this burden to those which she has constantly to bear as an unmarried mother.

It is not only a question of training, for training is no substitute for the right qualities of character and personality, but experience has shown that a Houseparent to fulfill his or her task must, apart from stamina, good health, a sense of humour, patience and tolerance, have a stable personality with a deep sense of vocation, combined with, above all, a high personal standard of conduct.

It is the Houseparents' job of work to show the way that Society expects the young child and the adolescent to behave in the community. They should be an example of those standards which they will be constantly endeavouring to inculcate into the minds of the young people under their influence and care. It is as grave a responsibility as normal parenthood itself.

It has been stated that the Committee recognises that its first responsibility in Education and Child Welfare is the child.

The Committee has further responsibilities to the parent of the child, to the Constable or Authority who places a child or children in its care and protection. The Committee recognises that it must have regard as well to young trainees, students and future applicants for jobs at Haut de la Garenne in considering this whole problem.

Having clearly recognised these responsibilities and all their implications the Committee gave the utmost sympathetic consideration to the problem of the unmarried mother herself.

The Children's Officer and her staff are becoming increasingly involved in the very disturbing problem of unmarried mothers in our Island. They now have to deal with well over 100 new cases a year and everything possible is done to help them with their perplexing and often distressing problems.

In the case of the unmarried mother with whom we are concerned, her baby was born on [redacted] and for a time she worked as a [redacted] in St. Helier and lived with her [redacted]

In [redacted] 1966 she was appointed to the [redacted] staff at Haut de la Garenne.

On [redacted] 1966, she and her child [redacted] At [redacted] request the Children's Officer agreed to provide her and her child with [redacted] at Haut de la Garenne.

The Children's Sub-Committee at a meeting held on 12th October, 1966, considered a suggestion that the unmarried mother be offered the post of Housemother and after considerable discussion decided to recommend the appointment to the Education Committee.

The minutes of the Children's Sub-Committee Meeting stated clearly:- "It was agreed that, if the Education Committee confirmed the recommendation, at the end of six months the Superintendent should submit a report on her for consideration by the Sub-Committee".

The Education Committee considered the recommendation on 26th October and for the reasons outlined in this statement did not accept it.

Unfortunately at the time of the meeting on 26th October neither the Education Committee nor the Children's Officer was aware that [redacted] had written an unqualified letter of appointment to the person concerned.

In the opinion of the Committee, this was an error of judgement on [redacted] part for whereas he was acting in accordance with normal procedure he was aware that the recommendation of the appointment of the unmarried mother to the post of Housemother had created much discussion at Sub-Committee level and was likely to be a matter of further serious consideration by the full Education Committee.

In fact it was on the 28th October, two days after the matter had been considered by the Education Committee that [redacted] gave the Children's Officer a copy of the letter of appointment dated 13th October.

Naturally the Education Committee accepts the full responsibility for the action of its Officers and wishes to apologise publicly for this error of judgement.

It is the intention of the Education Committee to recognise its legal obligation to the person concerned and to pay her three months wages in full in lieu of the notice to which she is entitled. It would then be the sole aim of the Education Committee to help this unmarried mother in every possible way as is done in all other cases.

The person concerned will be offered the post of [redacted] at Haut de la Garenne which she [redacted] and naturally she and her baby of [redacted] will retain [redacted] at the Home until such time as the Children's Officer can find [redacted] for her and her child and if she so wishes, more suitable work.

The Education Committee wishes to place on record its sympathy and understanding for this unmarried mother and the hundreds of others for whom it provides help and guidance.

The Education Committee has to refute certain statements that have been made through the Local Press.

It was reported in the [redacted] that the "Education Committee rescinded the recommendation that the unmarried mother should be promoted because, her union official has been told - she brought up her own child".

That is untrue.

It was further stated in the same Press article that "The Official alleges that the Committee President, Senator John Le Marquand, said that they would look into the matter further - but not until after the Elections".

That is untrue.

The only interview that took place was between the President and Mr. Liron of the Transport and General Workers' Union in the presence of the Director of Education and the Chief Administrative Officer. He was then informed by the President that the matter had been decided on a point of principle and that no matter what pressures the Union might decide to apply the decision would not be altered.

It is stated in the same article that "The Union say that the Committee's decision seems to be directly opposed to mainland policy where the National Union of Teachers is advocating that unmarried mothers be given maternity grants and that their jobs be held open for them".

This is not the policy of the National Union of Teachers.

(Sgd.) JOHN LE MARQUAND
Senator.
President, Education Committee.

28th November, 1966